



Floyd Thacker, in wagon, helps his father, Dave, yoke up ox team for annual Wasatch County Fair parades Friday, Saturday. Team is trained yearly.

Ox Team As Traditional As Wasatch County Fair

By JUNE J. WHEELER

Deseret News Correspondent

HEBER CITY — Dave Thacker, 83, and his trained oxen have become as much a tradition as the Wasatch County Fair — which opens here Thursday.

Each year Mr. Thacker takes a yoke of green oxen and trains them to pull a covered wagon for the parade. He has been doing this for over 20 years and has been in parades in Salt Lake City, Ogden, Provo, Orem, Nephi, and Vineyard. He has a shelf of trophies to show for his efforts.

"I enjoy driving oxen more than anything I have ever done," Mr. Thacker said. "I guess it is in my blood. My mother was born in an ox-drawn covered wagon on the plains of Nebraska 102 years ago. She was converted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in England.

3 YOKE

"I can remember helping my father at the sawmill when I was just a lad. We used three yoke (six head) of oxen working on a cart hauling logs to the mill." Oxen are more patient and steady than most beasts of burden, Mr. Thacker explained. They are better than horses for heavy work such as rock hauling and logging. Oxen, after being worked for several years, will often weigh a ton.

He recalls using oxen to clear sagebrush from 100 acres of land southwest of the Heber Valley Airport. He used a home-made grubber in the shape of a triangle made from a 3 by 8 board with blades along

two sides. The sagebrush was pushed into windrows where it was dried for a week and then burned.

TIE TAILS

When asked what procedure was used in training oxen he explained, "First I put a ring in their noses so that I can handle them. Then the yoke is placed on their heads and their tails are tied together so they can't pull away and turn the yoke."

Mr. Thacker made the yoke he uses out of hardwood. It weighs about 70 pounds. "I usually turn them into the corral with their tails fastened together for two or three days so they can get acquainted. I drive them around for a day or two before I hitch them to a wagon.

"When I feel that they are ready to be hitched up, I have my son, Floyd, ride brake on the wagon. My wife, Alice, braked for me in earlier days.

PULL ANYTHING

"You bet there's power in oxen," he boasted, "I always felt that I could pull anything that was loose with my oxen."

"Durham is the best breed for training," he explained. "Herefords and blacks are too mean and temperamental." He is using a three-year-old Holstein and a black bally (mixed breed) this year. One animal jumped the fence around the corral during this year's training. He has been working with the pair for almost two weeks.

Mr. Thacker has never received a serious injury from training oxen although he admitted he has had some close calls. The white lines marking the

pedestrian lanes on main street give him more trouble than any other thing during a parade. The oxen almost refuse to cross them. "I believe you could almost fence cattle by painting a line around them," he said.

Over Mr. Thacker's garage door is a yoke which is a prize item. It is over 100 years old. It was given to him by Floyd Bonner, a son-in-law. Mr. Thacker also sports a fancy Western tie, the tips of which are horns of steers carved out of petrified wood.

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